

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

CAREGIVER WELL-BEING

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While caring for an aging parent or loved one can be tremendously rewarding, it can also be physically, financially, and emotionally stressful, especially during the holiday season. If you've taken on a caregiving role in your family, you're probably dealing with a new level of responsibility while still managing your everyday obligations at home and work.

Caregivers often report feelings of anxiety, loss of sleep, and diminished personal health. Signs of burnout and caregiver stress include feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, irritability, emotional and physical exhaustion, frequent illnesses, changes in sleeping or eating patterns, and social withdrawal. Many of the symptoms of burnout are also seen in clinical depression.

Help from family, friends, professionals, and other community resources is critical, especially when an aging loved one has dementia, experiences frequent medical crises, is physically disabled, lives at a distance, or has few supports. Here are tips to cope with caregiver stress:

- **Take care of your physical and mental health.** Take breaks for regular exercise, healthy eating, adequate sleep, and activities that are enjoyable and relaxing. See your doctor for regular check-ups. Too often caregivers put their own needs last, but it's important to take time out for yourself.
- **Ask for help and respite care when you need it.** Don't isolate yourself from the supportive people in your life because you're "too busy." Be specific about what they can do. Perhaps it's grocery shopping, meal preparation, or running an errand.
- **Don't set unrealistic expectations.** No one is perfect. When you feel frustrated or overwhelmed, take a deep breath and step away for a moment until you feel calmer.

Joining a caregiver support group or talking with your EAP or a mental health professional, clergy, or trusted advisor can provide a safe place to vent. Online resources for caregivers include:

- AARP: <https://www.aarp.org>
- Family Caregiver Alliance: <https://www.caregiver.org>
- Family Caregiver Support Network: <https://caregiversupportnetwork.org>
- National Alliance for Caregiving: <https://www.caregiving.org>

